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ABSTRACT

Predictors of academic staff administrators' job change were studied based on a conceptual framework derived from Rosabeth Kanter's work on opportunity. Questionnaire data from higher education administrators who had been employed between 1973 and 1978 following the application of affirmative action to higher education were analyzed. "Academic staff" refers to positions that are adjunct to primary institutional tasks and are generally intended to support the organizational chain of command. The questionnaire addressed: administrators' educational and professional background, job characteristics, professional activities, observations about work responsibilities, career influences and prospects, and mentor relationships. The investigation entailed a secondary analysis of data originally collected as part of an administrator survey undertaken in 1979 in Pennsylvania colleges and universities. To determine the predictors of mobility for staff administrators, a series of stepwise multiple regressions were performed. Seven variables combined to account for nearly 50 percent of the variance. The predictors in order of importance were: age, planning to move to another position, and having a mentor relationship. Being a woman and serving as editor of a professional journal also entered the regression analysis with significant weights. Other characteristics that affected mobility were being married and serving as a president of a professional organization. The negative relationship of age to job change indicated that younger administrators are more mobile than older administrators. It is concluded that mobility or job change is a useful conceptual medium for looking at career opportunity. (SW)

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THE MOBILE STAFF: CONCEPTS AND DETERMINANTS OF ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATOR JOB CHANGE

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THE MOBILE STAFF: DIMENSIONS OF ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATOR JOB CHANGE

This study examines predictors of academic staff administrators' job change from a conceptual framework derived from Rosabeth Kanter's work on opportunity. Questionnaire data, from higher education administrators who had been employed between 1973 and 1978 following the application of affirmative action to higher education, were analyzed. The results indicate that one's age; future plans to move; having a mentor; one's gender and marital status; and selected professional activities influence job change.

THE MOBILE STAFF: DIMENSIONS OF ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATOR JOB CHANGE

Introduction

There has been increasing interest among researchers in administrator mobility resulting in descriptive accounts of its effect on the composition of the academic administrative cohort in colleges and universities. Several studies have focused on hiring practices (Dingerson, Rodman, and Wade, 1980; Socolow, 1978). Other studies have explored the hiring of women administrators (Hays, 1978; Moore and Sagaria, 1981) and changes in hiring practices in select types of institutions (Arter, 1973; Mattfield, 1972).

Less attention, however, has been directed to staff administrator job change, despite the recognition that the staff sector has provided many opportunities for entry and advancement into academic administration (Scott, 1978), particularly for underrepresented groups such as women (National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, 1978) and minorities (Van Alstyne and Withers, 1977).

Moreover, another dimension further underscores the relevance of including staff in higher education manpower studies. Research from the corporate sector (Rosenbaum, 1979) and higher education (Moore and Sagaria, forthcoming) has shown that job change is an important form of career progress and a way of increasing one's professional opportunities. This evidence juxtaposed with observations that internal higher education demographics and external economic and social trends may be constricting the number of vacant college and university administrative positions suggests that the complexities of mobility are becoming increasingly important for individuals planning job advancement.

This study is intended to provide a conceptually based empirical

analysis of what makes academic staff administrators mobile. This is accomplished by building upon Rosabeth Moss Kanter's (1977) concept of opportunity and related concepts from the higher education literature to offer a statement about characteristics that contribute to academic staff job change.

In this paper academic staff refers to positions that are adjunct to primary institutional tasks and are generally intended to support the "organizational chain of command." Such positions include assistant chief academic officer, associate dean of an academic subunit, assistant to the president, and assistant to the chief academic officer. While the staff and line distinction is not often used in colleges and universities, the delineation in this study is consistent with its use in management studies that compare line to staff with considerable differences resulting (Porter, 1963; Golembiewski, 1966; Lifter, Bass and Nussbaum, 1971). At the same time, it is acknowledged that other research using occupational titles indicates problems of classifying similar or identical position titles (Lawrence and Lorsch, 1965; Fisch, 1971). Nevertheless, the distinctions between staff and line in the aggregate do differentiate general characteristics of administrative jobs and are useful in analyzing mobility.

Theoretical Framework

In presenting a theory of human behavior or organizations, Kanter (1977) suggests that an individual's opportunities, manifested in mobility and growth, shape one's outlook and behavior and that people differ considerably as a result of their expectations regarding future prospects. Those with promising career opportunities tend to have high aspirations and self esteem, to consider work a central part of life, to be more committed to the organization, and to be willing to make concessions for it. Also, they are concerned with the job as a vehicle of mobility and growth. On the other hand,

those who perceive lower career opportunities tend to limit their aspirations, do not aspire for mobility and do not value more responsibility or more participation in a work setting. They tend to have low esteem, seek satisfaction in activities outside of work, and they are not likely to protest directly or seek change in an organization. Instead they tend to be concerned with fundamental survival and the economic or social rewards of the job (pp. 246-247).

On the basis of research in a large corporation, Kanter (1977) claims that mobility depends on such matters as organizational conditions, promotion rates from particular jobs, access to challenges to increase skills and rewards, and the person's future outlook relative to others. Moreover, she notes that sponsors or mentors are important in advancing the careers of managers by making introductions or training a person to move effectively. One's opportunities also are shaped before entering a profession by virtue of personal characteristics such as gender and age, and these characteristics tend to have an impact throughout one's career. In short, on the basis of Kanter's (1977) theory, mobility is an important form of career progress with significant implications for both the individual and the organization. The present study tested that theory with regard to colleges and universities by determining whether criteria advanced by Kanter were useful in explaining mobility of academic staff administrators.

Method

This study proceeded as a secondary analysis of data originally collected as part of an administrator survey undertaken by the Center for the Study of Higher Education of the Pennsylvania State University (Moore and Sagaria, forthcoming). In the original study undertaken in 1979, some 268 administrators in 80 four year colleges and universities in Pennsylvania were surveyed. For

the present study, only individuals who met the position criterion, were not members of religious groups, and had been employed throughout the period of 1973 and 1978 were selected (N = 91).

The years, 1973 to 1978, were chosen because they represent a time when colleges and universities were legally required to advertise position vacancies and to engage in equal employment practices. Further, they represent a period of enrollment stability and decline in Pennsylvania rather than one of growth that would inturn produce a demand for more administrators (as was the situation of the late 1950's to mid 1960's). Hence, these two conditions more closely approximate the conditions projected for the 1980's than any earlier period during the respondents' professional lives.

The study employed a 24 item standardized questionnaire (Sagaria, Note 1) which proceeded from Kanter's theory and collects objective information on administrators' educational and professional background, job characteristics, and professional activities. Also included are subjective data such as observations about work responsibilities, career influences and prospects, and mentor relationships. Selected demographic, work and career variables were used in the study. These include institutional type where employed, years in current position and time in institution prior to present position, having an earned doctorate, academic rank held, planning to move to another position, having a mentor, president of a scholarly or professional association, editor of a professional or scholarly journal, reader for a professional review committee, age, and gender.

To determine the predictors of mobility for staff administrators a series of stepwise multiple regressions were performed. Predictor variables were regressed on the dependent variable, number of job changes (0-4). In the first analysis the 12 variables were entered one by one from best to

worst provided they contributed to the variance in the dependent variable and met the .990 significance level for entry into the model. Through the first procedure the variable set was reduced to seven variables.

In the second multiple regression those dummy variables meeting the criteria of the first equation were entered. As in the previous equation, variables were entered by their relative contribution to explaining the greatest amount of variance, but unlike the first equation categories of each dummy variable were entered as a block.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Results and Discussion

The results of the trimmed regression model for staff mobility presented in Table 1 indicate that seven variables combined to account for nearly fifty percent of variance (Incremental R^2 = .4933). The predictors in order of importance are: age, planning to move to another position, and having a mentor relationship. Being a woman and serving as editor of a professional journal also entered the regression analysis with significant weights. Other characteristics that affected mobility were being married and serving as a president of a professional organization. The analysis reported here indicates that among the variables contributing to academic staff administrator mobility, age is the single most important, representing approximately 61 percent of the total variance for which the predictor variables accounted. The negative relationship of age to job change indicates that younger administrators are more mobile than older administrators. This corroborates other research in higher education (Sagaria and Moore, 1981). Investigating staff administrator job changes by age they found that there

was considerable mobility for staff administrators until about age 55 when approximately 38 percent of those aged 51 to 55 had changed jobs at least once between 1973 and 1978. Moreover, they found that intra-institutional mobility was more prevelant than inter-institutional mobility, and that staff administrators are considerably more mobile than line administrators. Similarly, Rosenbaum (1979) found a corporate preference for younger managerial employees (measured by mobility) in one corporation during both periods of contraction and growth.

Once the effect of age had been controlled, planning to move contributed significantly to explaining mobility (Incremental R^2 = .0526). Respondents were asked, "Do you anticipate moving to another position in the next five years?" and were provided with a trichotomous response alternative (1) yes, (2) no, or (3) uncertain. Relative to not planning to move, or uncertain about moving, planning to move in the next five years contributed most positively to mobility. This finding provides support for Kanter's (1977) hypothesis, formulated from observations of management behavior in corporations, that behavior is adaptive and those with high opportunity will seek out opportunities for job change or growth more so than those who have had little opportunity or who have had minimal job advancement. The fact that past job mobility can be predicted from future expectations makes a strong case for the interrelatedness of behavior and expectations. Also, this suggests that people differ considerably in regard to their future expectations -- those who plan to move have moved in the past. Carrying this interpretation further, those who have high aspirations have had promising careers.

The third variable to enter the equation and to contribute moderately but significantly to explaining mobility (Incremental R^2 = .0437) was having a mentor. This is consistent with Kanter's (1977) findings that managers

may advance rapidly with direct assistance of a sponsor or mentor. She observes that a system of sponsorship seems to determine who gets the most desirable jobs rather than an open system where individuals are advanced strictly on the basis of high performance and competence.

Turning to the higher education literature, the data presented here corroborate Moore's (1982) research on mentoring, which indicates that at most colleges and universities many senor administators -- deans, vice presidents and presidents -- have advanced largely because of the role of a mentor, someone highly placed with more experience, maturity, and power. At the same time Moore offers insightful observations that may explain the phenomenon observed in this study. She notes that individuals often identify their first job supervisor as a mentor and that a staff role in which the mentor and protégé have close and frequent contact is an optimum condition for the relationship to be cultivated. Further, she makes important distinctions about how a mentor relationship may ultimately make a difference between a staff administrator with considerable career opportunities and one with lowered opportunities:

> When the protégé is placed in an assistant staff position, we noted that there was an essential difference in the way a career staff person and the staff person being groomed for higher office think about their roles. Both may perform the same tasks to assist the boss-mentor, but the protégé staffer will invariably turn these tasks to service toward his or her own development. A permanent staffer performs the tasks because they are part of the job description or out of loyalty to the boss, but usually does not act with the intention of enchancing his or her chances for advancement. In certain cases, it may not be clear who is a permanent staffer and who is a temporary staffer unless one looks a subsequent events in the staffer's career. (p. 24)

Once the effect of age, planning to move, and mentor relationship entered the equation, gender -- in this case, being female -- entered to contribute moderately, but significantly, to explaining mobility (Incremental R^2 = .02641).

This finding associated increased mobility with being a woman. In discussing this phenomenon it is useful to consider that the affirmative action plans became part of the hiring procedures in higher education in 1972 and although the vast majority of administrators were men (Van Alstyne and Withers, 1977) women were beginning to be promoted into administrative positions heretofore held by men (National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, 1978; Howard, 1978). The data from this study are consistent with the aforementioned studies, all of which suggest that despite the preponderance of men in these positions, proportionally, more women than men changed jobs.

The three other variables contributing moderately, although not significantly, to academic staff mobility were editor or associate editor of a professional or scholarly journal (Incremental R^2 = .0164), marital status -- being married -- (Incremental R^2 = .0073), and president of a professional organization. Because an editorship and a presidency are similar in their contributions to the equation and in meaning within an organizational context, the two lend themselves to similar interpretations. While the contributions of the editor and president variables to the equation remain modest, it must be acknowledged, with an appropriate note of caution, that very few respondents held editorships or presidencies, thus accounting for a modest contribution variable.

Further, Kanter (1977) points out that advancement comes not only from performing one's job well, but also from undertaking out-of-the-ordinary, and visible activities. Such may be the view of an editorship and a presidency, since the represent external activities that bring attention to an individual and his or her institution as a result of the research, financial support, or visibility that accompany the responsibility. Similarly, the editorship and presidency place the individual in a boundary position between

his or her institution and the larger academic community. It remains unclear, however, whether the editorships and presidencies held were associated with scholarly publications and societies or with professional administrative organizations. Because respondents reported their professional activities for the past three years, it seems plausible that some of the positions may have been associated with their administrative responsibilities.

The other item to enter the equation -- being married -- is somewhat more difficult to explain than the other variables. Descriptions of personal characteristics of both administrators (Pennsylvania State University, 1982) and faculty (Astin, 1977) shows that nearly all men in higher education are married, while slightly less than half of the women are married. Clearly, in this area, more research is needed to educe meaningful analyses.

While this exploratory study offers insights into staff administrator mobility several caveats are recognized. First, practical considerations have restricted the sample included in this study to a small number of staff administrators. Second, this study measured mobility from job changes. An assessment of differential effects of intra- and inter-institutional job change was beyond the scope of this investigation. Lastly, since a multiple regression simply tests a null hypothesis (with a value of zero) against alternative hypotheses (of values greater or less than zero), the relative contribution of characteristics studied not only can change from sample to sample, but also have no absolute quality. In short, this exploratory study of administrator staff mobility offers as many insights as it raises questions in need of further exploration and clarification.

Conclusion

This study indicates that mobility can partially be explained by a combination of individual characteristics and behaviors. Mobility, then, should

be viewed as a complex phenomenon. Although the findings illuminate the importance of an individual in relation to a working environment, parts of which remain difficult to control, means exist through which people can work to increase personal career opportunities. This involves developing alliances and seeking relationships that may result in mentor sponsorships. In contrast, fundamental questions remain regarding age and job advancement: Is the relationship between age and mobility a result of an organization bias favoring youth as Rosenbaum (1979) would claim? Or, do younger staff administrators seek advancement through job change while older administrators seek other means of advancement?

Taken as a whole, the results of this study have several implications for the application of Kanter's conceptual orientation. First, mobility or job change appears as a useful conceptual medium for looking at career opportunity. Making a concept of mobility operational, testing it, and relating moderate variance to seven variables maintains a reasonable logic. These findings additionally provide support for Kanter's observations about the significance of a mentor, and about adaptive behavior as represented by the relationship between planning to move and previous job change. On other points, however, Kanter's perspective did not find support. For example, she stresses the importance of conditions in the organization; but in this study variables approximating structural constructs failed to emerge in relation to mobility. Further, she claims that organizational considerations are more important than individual characteristics. These data indicate otherwise: Three individual characteristics -- age, gender, and marital status -- contributed to the variance here in such a way as to suggest that career advancement through job change represents a more realistic alternative for some administrators than others.

Table 1

Stepwise Regression of Predictors of Staff Mobility

Variables	B-Value	Significance of Regression Coefficient	Incremental R^2	Total R^2
Intercept	2.0238			
Age	-.0390	.001	.3394	.3394
Moving to Another Position			.0526	.3910
Yes	.5188	.020		
No	.0236	NS		
Mentor (Yes)	.4575	.007	.0437	.4347
Gender (F)	.4818	.023	.0261	.4608
Editor, Professional Journal	.2887	NS	.0164	.4772
Marital Status (M)	.2816	NS	.0073	.4845
President, Professional Organization	.116	NS	.0088	.4933

N = 91 F ratio = 9.98 df = 8/82 $p < .001$

Note: *Since the program did not print added R^2 for each variable, incremental R^2 was computed by running several equations starting with the variable explaining the greatest amount of variance and adding one variable to the equation in each subsequent run. R^2 was the R^2 for the equation which had the variable minus the R^2 for the preceding equations.

TECHNICAL NOTE

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